DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 130 496 FL 007 930

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TITLE	Professional Meetings in The Language Sciences. A Pilot Study. LINCS Project Document Series.
INSTITUTION	Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C. Language Information Network and Clearinghouse System.
SPONS AGENCY	National Science Foundation, Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO	LINCS-10-69P
PUB DATE	Dec 69
GRANT	NSF-GN-771
NOTE	18p.; Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Comparative Analysis; Data Analysis; *Information Dissemination; *Information Networks; Information Processing; *Information Systems; *Linguistics; *Meetings; *Professional Associations; Questionnaires
IDENTIFIERS	*Language Sciences

ABSTRACT

In order to investigate the role meetings play in the dissemination of information in the language sciences, a questionnaire was devised to be sent to the participants in selected professional meetings. The responses from the participants in each meeting were to be analyzed to obtain a composite picture of the viewpoints represented, and the composites representing each meeting were then to be compared with each other. Difficulties prevented the completion of the study. This report contains results from two meetings: the Seventeenth Annual Conference of the National Society for the Study of Communication, and the Twentieth Annual Round Table of Georgetown University. A list of meetings proposed for study appears in Appendix A. Appendix B contains a sample letter of transmittal and a questionnaire. (Author/AM)

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CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS

LANGUAGE INFORMATION NETWORK AND CLEARINGHOUSE SYSTEM (LINCS)

PROFESSIONAL MEETINGS IN THE LANGUAGE SCIENCES

A Pilot Study

By

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FL007930

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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LINCS PROJECT DOCUMENT SERIES / NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION GRANT

LINCS #10-69P December 1969 NSF GN-771

CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS, 1717 MASSACHUSETTS AVENUE, N.W., WASHINGTON, D.C. 20036

Professional Meetings in the Language Sciences

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Charles Zisa

December 1969

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1. Design and Objectives

1.1. Definitions

One of the channels of information available to the language scientist is the professional meeting. The limited study of professional meetings undertaken by the staff of the Laaguage Information Network and Clearinghouse System (LINCS) project of the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) is directed toward the investigation of this channel of information from the viewpoint of those who attend the meetings.

The term professional meeting designates any formal gathering of scientific personnel for the purpose of discussing some aspect of their field of interest. To be included within the scope of this study, a meeting must be relevant to the language sciences and must not be restricted to the staff or personnel of the sponsoring organization. There is no restriction regarding co-sponsorship. Many meetings are co-sponsored by other organizations such as universities.

1.2. Significance

Preliminary surveys have indicated that meetings are regarded as important channels of information by language scientists. The information obtained at a meeting is immediate. Information obtained from printed sources is often out-of-date by the time it appears.

There are other means of obtaining immediate information, such as the telephone and correspondence. A meeting, however, offers the possibility of direct personal contact to all participants. This contact may be spontaneous requiring neither the formality of introduction nor advance arrangement. Meetings also provide a forum to which a speaker may present and by which he may test his findings.

1.3. Procedures

In order to investigate the role meetings play in the dissemination of information in the language sciences, a questionnaire was devised to be sent

to the participants in selected meetings. The lists of participants were to be obtained from the sponsoring bodies as soon as possible after the meetings had taken place. The responses from the participants in each meeting were to be analyzed to obtain a composite picture of the viewpoints represented, and the composites representing each meeting were then to be compared with each other. A list of meetings proposed for study appears in Appendix A.

The questionnaire (see Appendix B) is in two sections. Section A is directed primarily toward the specific meeting the respondent had attended and secondarily toward his opinions of meetings in general. Section B is directed toward obtaining minimal biographic data to provide a context in which to consider the responses to section A. Three basic questions are asked: What were the reasons for attending the meeting? What was accomplished at the meeting? How do meetings compare with other channels and sources of information? Although the questionnaire might have been designed to probe the subject more deeply, the shorter and simpler form was believed likely to elicit a greater response. Further, an in-depth study of one meeting was planned. (See section 3.)

1.4. Results

It was not possible to carry out the study as originally planned. First, budgetary restrictions necessitated a delay in implementation after the questionnaire was designed. Second, difficulties arose in acquiring lists of participants at the various meetings. As of June 30, 1969, three lists had been obtained. One was not usable, one was used, and the third was to be the subject of a later report. It was planned to continue this study through 1969, after which a final report on the findings of the study was to be published.

2. The Seventeenth Annual Conference of the National Society for the Study of Communication

One of the conventions chosen for study was the Seventeenth Annual Conference of the National Society for the Study of Communication, which met in Cleveland, Ohio, from April 24-26, 1969. The analysis of the

responses to the questionnaire directed to participants was intended to serve as a pilot study and to establish guidelines for future analyses.

In response to a request for a list of participants at the Conference, the Society sent a list of scheduled speakers and chairmen, a complete list of the participants not being available. Two persons were deleted from the original list, as they were foreign residents, and questionnaires were mailed to the 83 remaining. Of the 83 questionnaires, 4 were returned by the Post Office as undeliverable. Thirty-seven individuals responded to the questionnaire, of whom 2 stated that, although scheduled to attend, they had been unable to do so.

There are two limitations upon the validity of the data obtained. As the list included only the active participants, the group did not represent a cross-section of those who attended the meeting. Secondly, the response rate was only forty-seven percent, below that needed for a valid sample.

In spite of the limitations, the analysis which follows is comprehensive, far more comprehensive than the size of the sample warrants. This analysis was intended to serve as a model for future studies.

The first data to be considered concerned the reasons for attendance.

Table 1. Number of Participants by Reason for Attending

Reason	Number
Give a talk	29
Hear a particular talk	19
Broaden knowledge of field in general	20
Attend business or administrative session	10
See particular colleague	16
Represent employer	1
Seek a new position	3
Hire personnel	1

The table omits the 2 respondents who did not attend the meeting. Since 29 of the 35 active participants who responded attended to give talks, it was

assumed that the remaining 6 chaired some sessions. However, it should be noted that 2 who had delivered papers did not report this among their accomplishments at the meeting.

As would be expected from the nature of the original mailing list, the greatest number of people attended in order to deliver a talk. Excluding this general reason, most attended to hear a particular talk or to broaden their knowledge. These last two reasons plus seeing a particular colleague represented the most common combination. In terms of the population analyzed, it is somewhat surprising to note that 3 were seeking employment.

The number of persons who realized their objectives for attending the meeting parallels the numbers in table 1 closely. The major deviation is that one person who went to seek new employment was unsuccessful, and one person hired new personnel although he evidently had not anticipated so doing.

Most respondents had at least part of their way paid (15 totally; 11 in part; 9 none). The high number probably again reflects the restricted nature of the mailing list. Six indicated that attending such meetings was a duty of their employment (one of the 6, however, had to pay his own way). Interestingly, only one person reported his employer had sent him.

Geographic distribution is shown in table 2.

Table 2. Number of Participants by State of Residence

State	Number of Participants
Ohio	6
Pennsylvania	4
Wisconsin	4
Michigan	3
New York	3
Illinois	2
Kansas	2
Oregon	2
Florida	1
Indiana	1
Iowa	1
Kentucky	1
Maryland	1
Massachusetts	1
North Dakota	1
Utah	1
Washington	1
Total	35

The number of participants who had their way paid was compared with the number from each state. As no patterning was discernible, it may be concluded that having one's way paid had no effect upon attendance. Distance, however, does seem significant. Most of the respondents came from within a 500-mile radius.

Of the 35 who attended the meeting, one person attended none of the formal presentations and one person attended all. The rest spent time as follows: 4: twenty-five percent; 6: thirty percent; 9: fifty percent; 5: sixty percent; 9: seventy-five percent. The average is slightly above fifty percent.

Over the past 3 years attendance was evenly distributed at sessions of this meeting; 12 having attended 1 previous meeting; 10 having attended 2; and 12 having attended 3 past meetings.

Twenty-eight reported that they had attended between 1 and 3 national professional meetings in the past year; 6 reported between 4 and 5; 1 reported 7; and 1 reported that he had attended none. There was 1 non-response.

There seems to be no relationship between the number of societies to which the respondents belonged, and the number of meetings they had attended in the past year.

Table 3. Number of Participants by Number of Society Memberships

Number of Memberships	Number of Participants
1	3
2	6
3	7
4	8
5	3
6	6
7	3
8	1

Considering the number of past sessions of the meeting under analysis, the total number of professional meetings attended in the past year, and the number of societies each respondent belonged to, it was possible to conclude only that the respondents who attended this particular meeting were more likely to have attended other sessions of the same meeting.

The average number of societies to which the respondents belonged was 4. The most popular societies among the respondents were: the Central States Speech Association (21) and the Speech Association of America (19). The sponsoring society, the National Society for the Study of Communication accounted for 30. All other societies represented had a membership of 5 or less among the respondents. The total number of societies was 46.

The respondents were asked to rate various media of communication in their order of importance in furnishing information.

Table 4. Media of Communication Ranked by Importance (composite)

1. Journal articles
2. Books
3. National meetings
4. Discussion with colleagues outside place of employment
5. Discussion with colleagues at place of employment
6. Colleagues' manuscripts and preprints
7. Abstracts and abstract journals
8. Document dissemination systems
9. Technical reports not intended for publication
10. Oral presentations at staff meetings
11. Coursework and lecture notes
12. Correspondence

To arrive at a composite picture of the responses, the following technique was used. The number of mentions each medium received was multiplied by its importance rating. Questionnaire instructions indicated that the number 1 was assigned to the most important medium, 2 to the second most important, etc. These numbers were totalled for each medium and the media were arranged in rank order. Thus, Books were rated as the primary source of information by 11 respondents and assigned a value of 11 (1 x 11 equals 11); they were rated as the second most important source of information by 7 and assigned the value of 14 (2 x 7 is 14); and so on. The total thus arrived at was 136, which placed Books after Journal articles (109).

National meetings ranked third, with Discussions with colleagues outside of employment, as a source of information. Respondents were to suggest ways of making meetings more useful. The most frequent suggestions were advance distribution of papers and provision for more informal discussion of papers.

3. The Twentieth Annual Round Table Meeting on Linguistics and Language Studies

The Twentieth Annual Round Table Meeting, held at Georgetown University March 14 and 15, 1969, was selected for special analysis in connection with the LINCS study. The reasons for this choice were as follows:

1. The meeting was, because of its location, immediately accessible.
2. Its reputation is such that leading figures in the language sciences are attracted to it from all parts of the United States.
3. Since it is held at a university while classes are in session, students in the language sciences are also in attendance.
4. The cooperation of the host organization, Georgetown University, was assured.
5. The meeting is normally so organized that controlled observation is facilitated.

Two approaches were to be used in studying this meeting. First, 2 staff members were to attend it as observers. Second, the regular Professional Meetings Questionnaire was to be sent to the participants after the meeting had adjourned. The responses to the questionnaires were to be analyzed in the context of the reports of the observers. It was hoped that this technique would provide both an in-depth analysis of this particular meeting and also a means of checking the efficiency of the questionnaire.

Several factors, however, prevented the realization of the goals of this part of the LINCS study. First, a budgetary restriction led to an indefinite postponement of the entire study. When this restriction was removed and the decision made to proceed with the study, it was too late to train the staff members who were to attend the meeting in the necessary field methods. Although 2 staff members did in fact attend the meeting their observations were limited to the formal aspects of the meeting.

The observers noted that, in contrast to previous Round Table sessions, the topic of this meeting (Linguistics and the Teaching of Standard English to Speakers of Other Languages or Dialects) was very specific and consequently did not have the broad appeal of previous topics. The effect of this was to attract a more homogeneous audience than usual, the great majority of whom were from the Washington, D.C. area. It seemed that the audience represented, for the most part, fields marginal to the language sciences, such as education. The observers also noted that the meeting had more the aura of

a lecture series wherein the expert informs the non-specialist, than the usual character of past meetings wherein one expert submitted his findings to other experts for review and discussion. Thus, it was not possible to use the Georgetown Round Table Meeting to test the questionnaire as it did not provide the anticipated cross-section of the language sciences, nor was it a typical meeting.

Upon receipt, the list of participants at the meeting was examined in the light of the observations described above. Unfortunately, the list consisted of names, without addresses or professional affiliations. An extensive search through the rather sizable address files available to the LINCS project located the addresses of only twenty-five percent of the participants. If fifty percent of these responded to the questionnaire, the study of the Round Table Meeting would have rested upon a basis of thirteen percent, an inadequate sample. Of the addresses located, 100, or approximately two-thirds, were in the D.C. area, verifying the opinions of the observers. As they had just been sent a questionnaire in connection with the D.C. Case Study, it was feared that a potentially serious public relations problem might result if they were sent another questionnaire so soon. In the light of all these factors, it was decided to cancel the study of the Georgetown Round Table Meeting.

APPENDIX A

Professional Meetings Designated for Analysis
in Conjunction with the LINCS Professional Meetings Study
(January to June 1969)

Alaska Foreign Language Association
Central States Modern Language Teachers Association
Georgetown University Round Table
National Association of Language Laboratory Directors
National Society for the Study of Communication
Ohio Modern Language Teachers Association
Southeastern Conference on Linguistics
Washington Association of Foreign Language Teachers

APPENDIX B

Letter of Transmittal

JOHN LOTZ director

CENTER FOR APPLIED LINGUISTICS 1717 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

Telephone (202) 265-3100
Cables CENTAPLING

Dear Colleague:

The Center for Applied Linguistics, under a grant from the National Science Foundation (GN-771), is currently designing a Language Information Network and Clearinghouse System (LINCS) which is to be a comprehensive information system for the language sciences. The term "language sciences" includes all studies of language and language-related phenomena. Thus we are concerned with information flow in such fields as reading, speech, English and foreign language teaching, as well as with general and applied linguistics and language-related aspects of psychology, information science, computer science, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, biology, medicine, and physics.

One of the most important problems we face in designing such a system is to determine the information needs, interests, problems, and habits of its potential users, so that the system can be designed to be of maximum benefit, relevance, and convenience to them.

This questionnaire is being sent to people who have recently attended professional meetings involving the language sciences. Its purpose is to determine the reasons why people attend these meetings; what they do at them; and how they regard meetings as an information source. In order to place the responses in a proper perspective, minimal biographic information is also requested. We hope that the response thus obtained can be directed towards the improvement of professional meetings as a channel of information.

Your response in filling out this questionnaire would be of considerable help to us in determining how present and future information services can be of the greatest benefit to you and your colleagues. We thank you for your interest and cooperation.

Sincerely yours,

A. Hood Roberts
Director
Linguistic Documentation Program

QUESTIONNAIRE

A. CONVENTION INFORMATION The purpose of the following questions is to gather information about national professional meetings in the language arts and sciences and their role as an effective means for the exchange of information. "This meeting", as used below, refers to

the Ohio Modern Language Teachers Association Annual Meeting

which met on April 11-12, 1969.

1. Name_____ 2. Date prepared_____

3. For which of the following reasons did you attend this meeting? Check whichever are applicable.

a.____To give a paper or talk
b.____To hear particular paper(s) or talk(s)
c.____To broaden knowledge of field in general
d.____To attend business or administrative session
e.____To see particular colleague(s)
f.____Sent by employer
g.____To seek a new position
h.____Other (please specify)

4. Considering the reasons cited above, which would you say were actually accomplished by your attendance at this meeting?_____

_____

5. What percentage (roughly) of your time at this meeting would you estimate to have been spent in actual attendance at formal presentations associated with this meeting?

____25% ____30% ____50% ____60% ____75% ____100%

6. If this meeting is one that is held at regular intervals, how many of them have you attended in the past three years?_____

7. Did you come to this meeting at your own expense?____Yes ____No ____In part

8. Is attending meetings such as this one part of the duties of your employment?_____

9. Please list ALL professional societies of which you are a member.

10. How many NATIONAL professional and scientific meetings involving the language arts and sciences have you attended in the past year?_____

11. In the blanks below, please rate each of the media of communication listed in terms of how important it is in furnishing information you need. Rate by using numbers with 1 for the most important, 2 for the second most important, etc. If a given medium is NOT available to you, write no in the blank next to it.

a.____Books
b.____Journal articles
c.____Document dissemination systems e.g., ERIC
d.____Technical reports, other papers not intended for publication
e.____Abstracts, Abstract journals
f.____National meetings
g.____Oral presentations at staff meetings
h.____Colleagues' manuscripts or preprints
i.____Correspondence
j.____Discussion with colleagues at place of employment
k.____Discussion with colleagues outside place of employment
l.____Coursework and/or lecture notes

12. What suggestions do you have for improving the function of meetings as a source of information in the language arts or sciences? Please use a separate sheet of paper if necessary.

B. BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION If you have already completed a National Register of Scientific and Technical Personnel or a Roster of Linguists questionnaire for the Center for Applied Linguistics, you may omit the starred items unless there has been some change.

1. Mailing address

2. Date of birth _____ 3. Sex: male____female____

*4. Place of birth _____

*5. College and post-graduate training _____

College or University	Years attended	Major subject	Minor subject	Degree & Date awarded

*6. List below those fields in which you feel you have especial competence or greatest interest (e.g., structural analysis). Include languages, if pertinent.

a._____ d._____
b._____ e._____
c._____ f._____

7. Are you actively engaged in research or scholarship in any of these specialties? If yes, please list:_____

*8. List below those languages in which you are able to READ material about your field.

a._____ c._____ e._____
b._____ d._____ f._____

*9. Please indicate what you consider yourself to be professionally (e.g. dialectologist; language teacher). Do not use a job description.

_____

*10. Employment status (check whichever are applicable).

a._____Full-time employed
b._____Part-time employed
c._____Full-time student; where?_____
d._____Part-time student; where?_____
e._____Retired
f._____Not employed and not seeking employment
g._____Seeking employment

*11. If you are full- or part-time employed, please supply the following:

Name of employer _____

Place of employment _____

Title of position (if teaching, please give subject)

_____

Section or department _____

*12. Please list your publications, by title and date (if article, cite publication); or attach a personal bibliography.